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Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2019

Pearson Edexcel GCSE
In Arabic (1AA0) Paper 2H: Speaking

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Introduction

I would like to thank all the teacher examiners who conducted the speaking tests, this has been a considerable undertaking in the first year of the introduction of the new specification as there were major changes both in the content and in the requirements of the examination.

All 4 units of the examination now carry 25% of the total mark. The 2 tasks of the old speaking specification are now replaced by 3 which are, the Role Play Task, The Picture-based Task and the Conversation Task which itself covered two topics, part one is prepared by the student and part two is unprepared and selected by Pearson. Finally, the time allocation has increased, including the preparation time, which has now been extended to 12 minutes. All prompts on the paper were in the target language, and the assessment grids used by the examiners to mark the exams were revised. Despite the latter changes and the challenges, they presented, the students and the teacher examiners generally performed well and prepared conscientiously for the exams.

On the whole, the first series of this new specification was successful, with a lot of well-conducted tests in the majority of centres. There are some lessons to be learnt in other centres and this report will highlight the key issues and show how they can be tackled for the benefit of students. The standard of student work varied enormously, however, even the less able students in Foundation tier were able to communicate something over the three parts of the test.

Some students performed well in the role play and the picture-based but not so well in the conversation. For some students, the conversation was the students' strongest part. However, success in the role play and the picture based could lift an overall total mark to be on a par with that of a student who was much stronger in the conversation but had struggled with the first two tasks of the test.

There is evidence to suggest that some Higher tier students may have fared better had they been entered for the Foundation tier. It is recognised that the unavailability of a mixed-tier entry means that such decisions are complex.

Task 1: The Role Play

The Role-Plays tended to be done reasonably well, even by students who performed less well on the Picture-based or a general conversation so in order to achieve a good mark in this section, students need to be able to communicate fairly simple ideas in a defined context. Short and relevant answers were all that were necessary to access the full marks.

Several students clearly thought they would do better to give unnecessarily developed responses and at times the teacher examiners encouraged this by treating the Role-Play as an extended conversation. Such practice is a waste of time and effort as there are no extra marks for long, developed answers. Answers should be concise and to the point.

It is important that students' read the scenario carefully in order to understand where the Role-Play is situated to aid understanding before completing the task and providing answers that are in context.

Occasionally students ignored the question mark in front of the bullet point and made a statement rather than asking a question, thereby forfeiting the marks. In addition, many students offered opinions and reasons that were not required. The unprepared bullet point, indicated by (!) was difficult for some but not as challenging as the (?) bullet point, which required students to ask a question to the teacher. The need for students to practise generating questions in class cannot be stressed enough. As the first hurdle, an inability to produce interrogative pronouns seriously

undermined efforts to gain marks in this item. Some students asked a completely random question rather than one linked to the cue.

It is not acceptable to say 'أو هل لديك سؤال؟' 'أسألني سؤال؟'. Teachers should also keep to the register that is within the scenario and not change it to their normal teaching style.

Teacher examiners generally conducted the test professionally, although some impacted the marks by straying from the scripted questions, paraphrasing or adding extra information. A few teacher examiners failed to read out the introduction as scripted or omitted one of the bullet point questions. Again, these omissions are often detrimental to the performance of students. Some students did not adhere just to the information which they were required to communicate but elaborated, sometimes greatly, on their response. The introduction of extraneous material in the Role Plays must be discouraged as it lengthens the test unnecessarily and thereby tires the student sooner. Teacher examiners are reminded that they must adhere to the script as printed in the Teacher's Booklet. Failure to do so meant that some students' responses could not be credited.

Hence, it is worth remembering **The Marking Principles agreed across all modern languages:**

- If a teacher examiners' changes a question or inserts a supplementary question, there can be no credit for a response made by the student.
- Where a student has offered an incorrect response to a question, the teacher examiners' may not repeat the question. If s/he does so and the student then gives a correct response, this is ignored.
- Teacher examiners may repeat each question twice but may not rephrase any of the questions.

Task 2: The Picture-Based

This task is designed to allow students to explore a theme more freely. The questions focus on a specific topic and invite students to present their ideas and views once they have described the contents of the photo. In this task, most students did well and had prepared carefully and thoroughly during the 12-minute period allocated for preparation time. Unlike the Role Play, there were marks available for extended answers in Communication and Content as well as marks for the Knowledge and Accuracy of language. Students were expected not only to develop their responses but also to express opinions and justify them and to narrate and describe events. Two of the bullet points required the use of the past and future tenses or time frames and at Higher Level, students had to contend with an unexpected question that prompted an opinion from the student on an aspect of the topic. As with the Role Plays, teacher-examiners must keep to the script without changing or paraphrasing any of the questions and without adding any supplementary, unscripted questions. If they do, then again, they will deprive their students of marks and any extraneous questions together with the responses are ignored.

Students could acquit themselves as well as they might in the time available. Some teacher-examiners tended to interrupt students when they were developing their answers. Timing of this part of the test revealed that further elaboration from the student would have been possible in the time allowed. Please remember that a demonstration of the ability to develop responses is one of the criteria in the upper half of the mark scheme.

Some teacher examiners conducted the exam properly with no problems; however, a larger number of teachers-examiners were unsure of the process and rules and this affected the student's marks significantly, even though the students' answered with accurate responses and great fluency.

A weaker performance often resulted from a lack of vocabulary or appreciation of grammar, although, students could respond to the 5 prepared questions. Some Higher tier students acquitted

themselves very well and the openness of some questions enabled them to draw on more complex vocabulary and structures. At both tiers, a lack of development of responses was the greatest barrier to scoring high marks.

It was, quite common for teacher examiners to introduce their own questions and students unfortunately failed to gain credit as a result. **Teachers are advised to adhere strictly to the guidelines, which are very clear on this point.**

Finally, it is worth remembering **the Marking Principles agreed across all the modern languages:**

- students must refer to the visual image in response to the first bullet point question.
- Where a teacher-examiner changes a question, or inserts a supplementary question which is not scripted, there can be no credit for a response made by the student.
- Teacher examiners may repeat each question twice but may not rephrase any of the questions.

Task 3: The Conversations

For most students, they performed best in the Conversation element. This was expected as there was a similar continuity from the previous specification and both teacher examiners and students could add further elaboration to their questions and responses.

Students were required to participate in two conversations, the first part is selected by the students as they prepared this before the exam and the second part was selected by Pearson. An equal amount of time should have been allocated to each of the conversations and the total time was 3½ - 4½ minutes at Foundation and 5 – 6 minutes at Higher.

There were some impressive and spontaneous conversations from the highest-achieving students. For some students, there was an imbalance between their exploration of their nominated theme and that of the second theme in terms of quality of communication.

It is essential to keep strictly to the timings and avoid any imbalance between the two conversations or any shortfall or excess in timings. Most teacher examiners' put their student at ease, using a friendly tone of voice and spoke clearly and slowly so that the students had little or no problems in understanding the questions.

In terms of communication, centres are reminded that marks are based on the amount of information successfully conveyed by the student. Marks are considered as to how students reflect and elaborate on their answers. More able students should be encouraged to develop their ideas and to produce descriptive and concise responses.

For the first part of the Conversation, students should be encouraged to introduce the topic they have chosen for up to one minute prior to the interaction with the teacher-examiner. It is equally important to ensure that students are not allowed to go on beyond the first minute and teacher examiners should interrupt with their first question if the student seems determined to continue with a monologue, which means a minimum of 6 marks could be lost for interaction and spontaneity! It is important to note that the presentation is meant to take no longer than one minute; many schools exceeded this time limit with the monologue taking between 3-4 minutes. Some teachers also failed to ask questions beyond student's presentation, and this meant they were asking questions that the students just mentioned within their own monologue. On numerous occasions in their questions, some teacher examiners strayed beyond the Theme which was being discussed.

Some teacher examiners are still relying on a list of prepared questions and in one extreme case all the students had been directed to prepare the same topic for Conversation 1, even to the extent of providing identical introductions for the first minute. Moreover, the teacher examiners' read out the same questions to each of the students so that the examination became a question and answer session instead of a spontaneous conversation. Some teacher examiners had clearly not been listening carefully to what the students were saying and confused them by asking questions the answers to which had already been covered in the initial presentation.

For the second part of the conversation, some teacher examiners failed to follow the grid they were given, and this meant they asked the student questions from the wrong theme. Unfortunately, some teacher examiners did not ask questions in standard Arabic and it seemed that some students were more confident than the teacher examiners' themselves.

The Conversations should be allowed to develop naturally, and the teacher examiners should listen carefully to what the student is saying and build the conversation accordingly. It is certainly worth preparing topic related questions in advance in case the conversation grinds to a halt, but it is not a good idea to rely exclusively on prepared questions as this destroys spontaneity and the natural flow of conversation. Some students were disadvantaged because the teacher examiner' failed to ask any questions that required the use of a tense other than the present.

Again, it is worth remembering **the Marking Principles that have been agreed across all modern languages:**

- Foundation Conversations should last for between 3½ and 4½ minutes while Higher Conversations should last between 5 and 6 minutes.
- Timings begin with the student's first utterance.
- Conversations that are too short are likely to be self-penalising.
- Conversations that are too long: once the 4½ (F) or 6 (H) minutes have passed, examiners stop listening and assessing at the end of the student's response to the current question.
- An equal amount of time must be allocated to each Conversation.
- Where the first Conversation is a monologue and has no interaction, students will be limited to a maximum score of 6 marks for Interaction and Spontaneity. The marks for Communication and Content and Linguistic Knowledge and Accuracy, however, are unaffected. The most popular choices of Topics for the first Conversation were the Environment, Who Am I? Holidays, School life and Educational visits

Administration

There was far less administration with the new specification and therefore less problems. Generally, tests were well administered but some centres submitted inadequate recordings. The problem was usually caused by the tests being recorded at a very low volume such that they were virtually inaudible. In other cases, the teacher could be heard clearly but not the student. Please remember that teachers are used to projecting their voice and therefore are likely to be louder; the microphone should be positioned closer to the student and the sound level should be set according to the student's output. On other occasions, there was extremely intrusive electronic noise from the recorder which made the marking very difficult for the examiner. It is recommended that teachers spot-check recordings. Where centres send encrypted recordings, the necessary password must be supplied, under separate cover if so desired.

Some centres failed to submit the CS2 forms, or submitted unsigned ones and others omitted to include the track list. It is very useful if teacher examiners can announce the Role Play card number and the Picture Card number at the start of the tasks, as well as the Theme for each of the Conversations at the beginning of each one.

Most centres applied the sequence correctly although some made mistakes and included a note of apology or an explanation. At times following the grid caused some confusion and several centres failed to do so correctly resulting in themes being repeated. Even when the sequence was not applied strictly, however, most of the centres did make sure that the students covered four themes (Role Play + Picture Task + Conversation 1 + Conversation 2).

Some tasks were used less frequently than others, maybe due to sequence and the choice of the topic for the first conversation.

In some centres the Role Play and the Picture-based card numbers in the recordings do not match with information in the CS2 Form. In some cases, the centre did not provide the CS2 and did not mention the card numbers even in the recordings.

Centres are reminded that it is important to check for compatibility and details of accepted digital formats (.mp3 (at least 192 kbit/s), .wav, .wma), these are listed in the Administrative support guide. There were a significant number of centres where CDs were incorrectly labelled, and centres are kindly reminded to include with the CDs or USBs the track list, giving details of the centre number, student name and number, language and series. Centres should check the labelling of the CD, especially where the software just details Track 1, Track 2 etc. These should be changed to reflect the correct labelling as indicated in The Administrative support guide.